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Farm Mobilization FACT SHEET

Farm Safety Practices Can Boost Production



U. S. farmers are in the midst of the biggest job ever asked of them--to produce record supplies of food and fiber to help strengthen the Nation against the forces of aggression. Yet, the high production goals of 1952 have come at a time when farmers face a decreasing labor supply in many important producing areas of the country. To help meet these goals, it will be necessary to make the most efficient and full use of the number of workers available.

Each year farm accidents take a huge toll in human lives, lost time, lowered production, and destruction of buildings, equipment, farm animals, and crops. Such accidents seriously diminish farm output. In view of the high production needed this year, safety assumes new importance on the farm.

July 20 to 26 is "National Farm Safety Week," but to help meet farm defense production goals, farm safety must be practiced 52 weeks a year.

An active farm safety program all through the year will require concerted action on the part of everyone who can help. Agricultural Mobilization Committees, and State and local safety committees can provide the impetus for greater cooperation. This fact sheet presents data showing the magnitude of farm accidents, and the need for farm safety, and gives suggestions on how safety committees can work with other groups and organizations in promoting a safety program the year-round.

FARM ACCIDENTS TAKE BIG TOLL

In 1951, about 15,000 farm residents were killed in farm accidents. Another 1,300,000 farm people were injured. A recent survey indicated that an average of 17,000,000 man days of labor are lost each year because of accidents. This is the equivalent of more than 56,500 workers employed for an entire year. During World War II farm accidents caused enough lost time to produce 750,000,000 bushels of wheat--75 percent of our average yearly wartime production.

These figures on farm accidents become more significant when they are related to the fact that the number of persons employed in the farm work force has been declining for a long time, with the rate of decline accelerating as a result of increased defense activities. We have no reserve pool of manpower such as we had at the start of World War II. The average number of persons employed in farm work in 1940 was 11,671,000. By 1945 the number had dropped to 10,813,000 and in 1951 went still lower to 10,022,000. Reports from many State Agricultural Mobilization Committees early this year indicated that the manpower supply was of increasing importance as a limiting factor on production.

FARMERS INCREASE PRODUCTION THROUGH EFFICIENCY

Farmers have been increasing production during this period very largely through increased efficiency of the farm work force. Using 1935 to 1939 as a base period, output per man hour for the average farm worker increased from an index of 100 (1935-39) to 112 in 1940, to 136 in 1945, and continued to rise to 162 in 1951.

Improved farm technology, including increased mechanization, has made the American farmer and farm worker the most efficient agricultural producer in the world.

As a result of this increased farm mechanization and improved technology, the loss of a trained and experienced worker by accident affects farm production more than ever before. More training and experience are now required to be a competent farm worker, and it is difficult to find qualified replacements.

INDIVIDUAL FARM WORKER'S CONTRIBUTION MORE VITAL

On the basis of 1951 population figures, each person employed in agriculture produced enough food and fiber to meet his own needs and those of 14 other persons. With increased emphasis on more production and the decrease in farm workers, each worker's contribution becomes more important. If production goals are to be met, the limited labor supply must be used as efficiently as possible. This means not only the use of good management practices and more efficient methods of doing work, but also the safest possible working conditions.

The battle of production has moved into high gear in 1952 and farm manpower is one of our critical resources. Injury of a single worker--especially a skilled worker--can mean a serious loss in production.

AGRICULTURE A HAZARDOUS OCCUPATION

Agriculture is a hazardous occupation. Each farm is a separate business, usually with separate management and involving a wide variety of activities and working conditions. Labor shortages--such as now face many farmers--result in longer working hours and greater work loads. This encourages taking short cuts, postponing needed repairs, and other practices which can cause accidents. Precautions taken now and every day of the year will prevent such accidents. If every farm man, woman, and child can be made conscious of the hazards of farm work, and how to eliminate such hazards, he will continue to contribute fully to the big production job in which farmers are now engaged.

FARM ACCIDENTS NUMEROUS; MOST CAN BE PREVENTED

Causes of farm accidents are many, but nearly all are preventable. Too often farm people fail to take steps to avoid accidents. In many cases simple safety devices, careful handling, and common sense can prevent accidents. A good workman taking safety precautions can protect his own life, his family, his animals, his buildings and equipment. This can result in greater production with available facilities. Chief causes of farm accidents include:

Farm Machinery--Many farm accidents are caused by careless handling of farm machinery and equipment, but even a careful operator may have an accident if he is operating broken or worn equipment. A protective maintenance program to keep equipment in good repair and working order could do much to keep down farm accidents.

Farm Animals--Another common cause of accidents is farm animals. Some accidents caused by animals are unavoidable, but most of them result from careless handling by farm owners or workers. For example, a dangerous bull not properly confined may kill or injure a farmer, a farm worker, or a member of the family. Proper safety measures can curb most, if not all such accidents.

Farm Fires--Fires cause an annual property loss of more than \$100,000,000 on American farms. They also cause 3,500 of the 15,000 farm deaths each year, as well as losses of farm animals, valuable food, clothing, building materials and equipment. Such fires occur at the rate of 300 per day. Most of them can be traced to such causes as defective heating plants, flammable roofing materials, overloaded electrical wires, and lack of protection from lightning.

Experience has shown that farm fires many times result in total loss of buildings and other property, and that only about 50 percent of the loss usually is covered by insurance. Fires also disrupt farm work and reduce farm production and farm income.

Electrical Hazards--Electricity must be treated with respect. Many farm accidents are caused by the careless use of electricity. Now with 85 percent of our farms electrified--and electricity a major source of farm power--this becomes a greater problem.

Some of the major causes of electrical accidents come from overloaded wires, failure to turn off the master switch when making repairs, using pennys for fuses, and open sockets.

Household Mishaps--Four thousand farm residents die each year from accidents that happen in the home. These accidents involve not only the homemaker and children, but also men who are producing food. Thus, home safety is important also in meeting the production goals. Regardless of whether the accident occurs in the home or out on the farm, a well-equipped home first aid kit makes it possible to take care of small injuries promptly and to prevent them from becoming serious.

FARM SAFETY IS A JOB FOR MANY PEOPLE

Since the efficient use of the farm labor supply is a matter of direct concern to the success of the production goals program, USDA State and County Agricultural Mobilization Committees are being asked to give full support to farm safety activities. All agencies represented on the committees have a part in this effort.

Full success in farm safety will require a year-round program.

In addition to the various activities that can be carried out by USDA and associated agricultural agencies, other suggestions for participation in farm safety activities include:

- o Enlisting the cooperation of civic and service clubs, women's clubs, church groups, and other community groups.
- o Furnishing farm safety information to school outlets, farm organizations, and rural youth groups.
- o Furnishing information on the aims of the farm safety program and local activities to local press, radio, and television channels. Newspaper mats illustrating the farm safety idea can be obtained from the National Safety Council, 425 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago 11, Illinois.
- o Enlisting the cooperation of farm equipment dealers in promoting safe use of farm machinery through distribution of leaflets and other materials, and training of purchasers of new equipment in safe operating rules and preventive maintenance.
- o Providing some recognition for farmers who follow good safety practices and who have eliminated farm accident hazards on their farms.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Write to the Office of Information, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington 25, D. C., for free copies of the following publications:

Protection of Buildings and Farm Property from Lightning, FB 1512--32 pages.

Fire Safeguards for the Farm, FB 1643--32 pages.

Safe Use and Storage of Gasoline and Kerosene on the Farm, M 1678--14 pages.

Watch Your Step: Avoid Farm Accidents, M 608--32 pages.

State Farm Safety Programs, mimeographed, Nov. 1951, BAE pub.--19 pages.

Slidefilm--Prevent Farm Fires, No. 642--38 frames (60¢ single; \$1.00 double)
Order from Photo Lab. Inc., 3825 Georgia Ave., N.W., Washington 11, D. C. Motion pictures--Dead Out (20 min.) rural brush fires, (2 reels, 16 mm., sound, color, released 1948. Available from State film libraries, usually located at land-grant colleges.

State Extension Services will be source of information on farm safety and fire prevention.